

SJSU | UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM

SPRING 2026

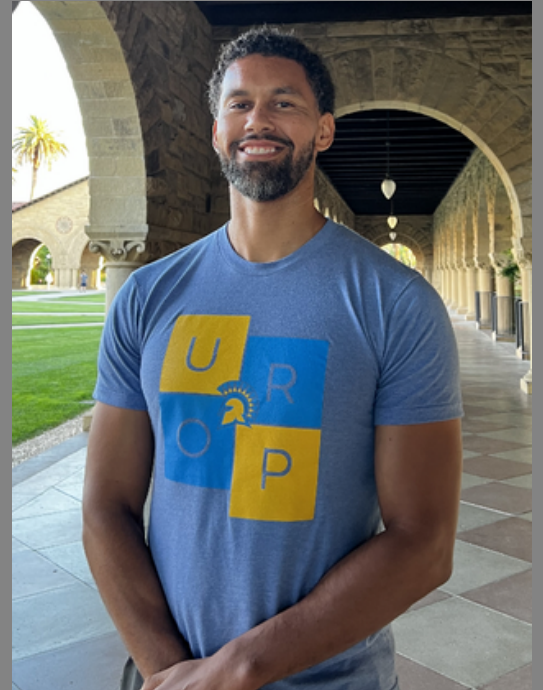
NEWSLETTER



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

DR. ANDREW CARTER

As we prepare for the second annual UROP Research Showcase this week, I find myself reflecting on yet another tremendous year of growth for our program. This year is especially meaningful as we celebrate UROP's fifth anniversary on campus. What began in 2021-22 with just 13 students and 12 faculty mentors has grown into a thriving campus-wide initiative serving 103 students and 54 faculty mentors in 2025-26. Watching the program grow so quickly over the past five years has been an incredibly rewarding experience and one that I am privileged to be a part of.



UROP's calling card since its inception is as a focus on interdisciplinary collaboration. This year's cohort took this ethos and ran with it; together, they formed 46 interdisciplinary projects that brought together students and faculty from different colleges across campus. In addition to the fruitful experiences gained in the lab, our students achieved a range of successes over the course of the year, including nine academic conference presentations, four fellowships earned, seven participants in the SJSU RSCA Competition, one participant in the CSU Research Competition, and a record-breaking 10 students accepted into the McNair Scholars Program for the 26-27 AY. We also had great success with our pilot community partnership program with the African American Community Services Agency and Roots Community Health. We look forward to bringing on additional community partners as we grow the program.

As I reflect on all that UROP has accomplished over the past five years, I remain more energized than ever about the future of the program and the opportunities that lie ahead for our students, faculty, and community partners.

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FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

DR. KEZBAN YAGCI SOKAT



Dr. Kezban Yagci Sokat is an Associate Professor of Business Analytics at SJSU and a Research Associate at the Mineta Transportation Institute. Her work applies decision analytics and management science to pressing societal challenges, with a particular emphasis on combating human trafficking. Her research has informed policy and practice both in the United States and globally,

including SB-1–funded work examining transportation system vulnerabilities during major events. In addition to serving on the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking, she has received numerous honors, including a U.S. Senate Citation and the 2024 AACSB Influential Leader Award. Through her scholarship and service, she continues to shape the intersection of data, policy, and human rights.

For the past three years, Dr. Yagci Sokat has been an active mentor in UROP, motivated by a deep commitment to student mentorship and expanding access to research, especially for students from underrepresented and low income backgrounds. Drawing from her own experiences, she is intentional about creating inclusive opportunities for students to engage in meaningful, hands-on research early in their academic careers. She currently leads multidisciplinary projects such as “Impacts of Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive: A Multidisciplinary Global Perspective” and “Combating Human Trafficking at Major Events through Transportation,” both of which use multi-method approaches to address complex human rights challenges.



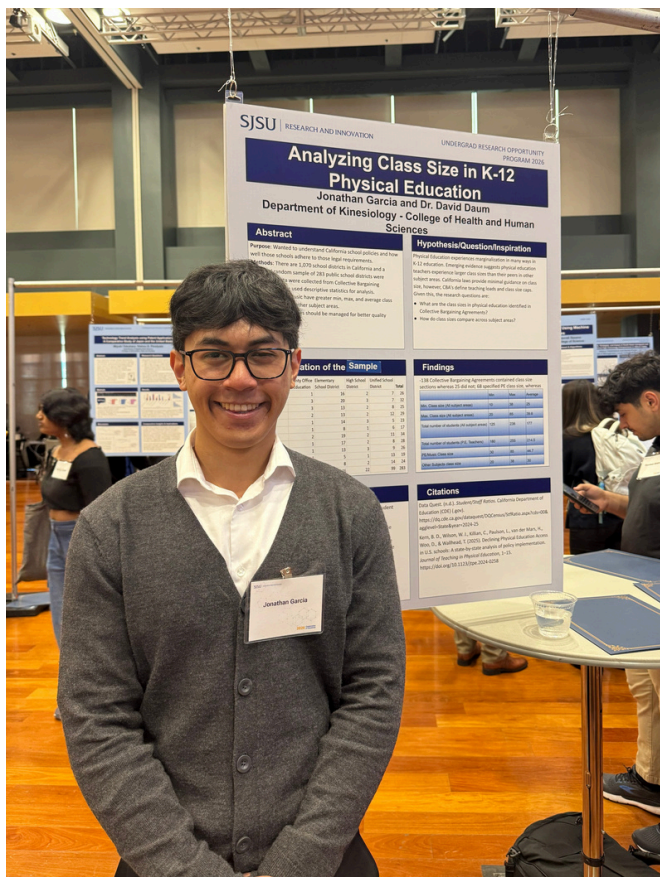
Dr. Yagci Sokat and her student mentees at the "Safety in Motion: Combating Human Trafficking, Exploitation, and Violence" conference in San Jose on October 29, 2025.

Under her mentorship, UROP students have achieved significant milestones, including presenting at conferences, such as the Safety in Motion Conference, and leading a campus-wide event, "Mega Event Safety: Student Voices on Human Trafficking." This student-driven initiative, developed in collaboration with SJSU organizations, such as Boundary.0 and the Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement, drew over 80 participants and contributed to broader university efforts under the Future of Humanity and Society initiative. Her students have also co-authored and published work, including a widely shared blog post highlighting student perspectives on human trafficking and transportation.

Reflecting on her experience, Dr. Yagci Sokat describes mentorship as deeply rewarding, particularly as she witnesses students grow in confidence, independence, and intellectual curiosity. She emphasizes that early engagement in research equips students with critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills while helping them explore future career paths. Her advice to students is clear: stay curious, take initiative, and embrace challenges as opportunities for growth. By fostering strong mentor-mentee relationships and encouraging persistence, she empowers students to make the most of their research experiences and to contribute meaningfully to solving real-world problems.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

JONATHAN GARCIA, PHILOSOPHY MAJOR



Jonathan Garcia, a member of the 2025–2026 UROP cohort, is a senior philosophy major with interests in legal studies and public policy. After transferring from San Mateo Community College, he joined UROP with limited familiarity with research. Still, he recognized its potential as a “powerful tool” for contributing to meaningful discussions in philosophy and professional development, offering opportunities to learn field-specific skills and knowledge that are often difficult to acquire outside of a research setting.

Driven by a desire to better understand the systems and dynamics shaping policy, Jonathan was drawn to Dr. David Daum’s research on K–12 Physical Education class sizes. The project examines how California law and collective bargaining agreements influence school policies that determine class size. Their work aims to highlight policy shortcomings that may contribute to larger class sizes, which are associated with reduced instructional quality and potential concerns for student safety.

“

I am being pushed past my comfort zone, but UROP made me realize there is something more important than staying there.

- Jonathan Garcia

Through his involvement in the project, Jonathan has developed a more nuanced understanding of research: one that extends beyond the settings of the lab. His experience in UROP has encouraged him to become “open to criticism,” strengthen his critical thinking skills, and build meaningful connections with peers and faculty. He was especially struck by the collaborative nature of research, mentioning, “There’s a lot more, I’d say, community aspect to it.”

Reflecting on the last year, Jonathan credits much of his development to the thoughtful feedback and questions from his UROP peers, mentors, and program director, Dr. Andrew Carter, who challenged him to continuously improve. As he prepares to graduate in the coming academic year, he looks forward to continuing his collaboration with Dr. Daum and hopes to eventually share their findings with legislators and other stakeholders invested in California public education policy.

For future UROP students, Jonathan acknowledges that the program can feel intimidating—particularly when navigating time-taxing project expectations or developing public speaking skills. However, he emphasizes that maintaining a positive mindset and actively engaging with the program’s support systems are key to success.

ALUMNUS SPOTLIGHT

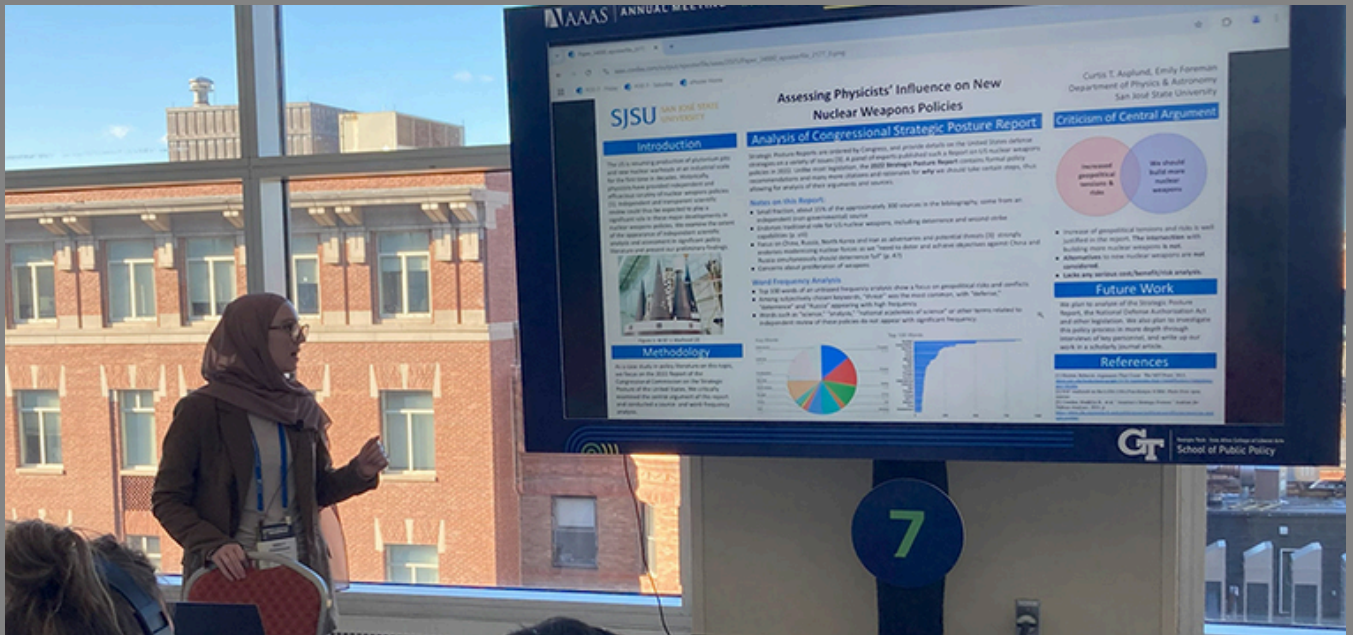
EMILY FOREMAN (2023-2024 COHORT)
PHYSICS MAJOR



Emily Foreman is a UROP alumna from the 2023-2024 cohort, currently majoring in physics. Shortly after enrolling at SJSU, Emily had the slightest idea of what research actually was, let alone how to participate in it. That all changed when a project proposal in her Physics 49 class opened the door to research in her discipline. The following year, Emily enrolled in UROP, where she worked with Dr. Curtis Asplund on nuclear physics policy. Through both her work in the lab and the UROP course curriculum, she discovered the interdisciplinary possibilities within physics research. Today, Emily continues her work with Dr. Asplund on physicists' influence on new nuclear weapons policies, as she is currently looking to publish her findings.

UROP was essential to building Emily's confidence in both research and academia. UROP taught her that it is okay to not know everything but to keep asking questions. Following the program Emily built on her newfound confidence and explored other research within her discipline.

Eventually she arrived at Dr. Nicholas Esker's Nuclear Targetry Lab, where she continues to work today. Her experience led her to the "Mt. ENS" program, a joint partnership between SJSU and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL). Emily works on isotope production, specifically for medical purposes such as cancer treatment or imaging reagents.



Emily presenting her poster at the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Boston, MA on February 14, 2025.

Research showed Emily her motivating interest for all of the work she participates in. Emily believes in "human-centered science" and advocates for an understanding that "our work has impacts." This upcoming summer, Emily will voice the impacts of her work specifically to federal policymakers in Washington D.C. She has previously attended conferences where she had the opportunity to present her work and deepen her knowledge of both experimental physics and physics policy.

In the future, Emily intends to carry her motivations throughout the rest of her career as she works towards a PhD. For future and current UROP students, Emily advises, "Keep pursuing research. Keep talking to your mentors. The support systems you've built through UROP don't leave after the program ends. Keep exploring, figuring out what you like, and keep pushing."

STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Congratulations to our current students and program alumni for their successes over the past academic year

2025-26 COHORT

Ara Anandkumar

- Accepted co-authored paper titled “Designing for Transformation: A Pilot Content Analysis Study of the Characteristics of Transformative Media” to be presented at the 2026 Association for Information Science & Technology conference in Albuquerque, NM (June 2026) (Faculty mentor: Carli Lowe)
*recipient of UROP travel award

Ares Casas

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)

Bradley Haraguchi

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)

Caitlin Gocecamat

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)
- Presented paper titled “Malayo at Malapit: A Case Study of Colorism for an American-Born Swiss-Raised Filipino at the 69th Spartan Psychological Association Research Conference in San Jose, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Lesther Papa)
- Accepted into Stanford Storytelling and Medicine Summer Scholars Program (summer 2026)

Debora Thekkekkara

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)
- Presented paper titled “Motivations, Strategies, and Impact of South Asian Immigrant and Transnational High-Technology Entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley” at the California Entrepreneurship Educators Conference in San Diego, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Sarika Pruthi) *recipient of UROP travel award

STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Erika Ebreo

- Presented poster titled “Influence of Specific Mutations on Viral Thermostability in Bacteriophage ϕ 6 Under Heat Stress” at the 2026 West Coast Biological Sciences Undergraduate Research Conference in Rohnert Park, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Sonia Singhal) **recipient of UROP travel award*
- Presented poster titled “Influence of Specific Mutations on Viral Thermostability in Bacteriophage ϕ 6 Under Heat Stress” at 16th Annual Bay Area Biomedical Device Conference in San Jose, CA
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Center for Digital Agriculture REU summer research fellow (summer 2026 cohort)

Hannah Tofesha

- Accepted co-authored paper titled “Using semi-structured vignettes to examine caregiver approaches to addressing challenging behaviors in early childhood” at the International Congress of Infant Studies in Panama City, Panama (July 2026) (Faculty mentor: Dr. Janet Bang)

Henry Li

- SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory summer 2026 intern

Hoang Minh Hung Nguyen

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)

Jayden Thai

- Presented paper titled “Volatile Memory Forensics of Tails OS in a Virtualized Environment” at the 14th International Symposium on Digital Forensics and Security in Boston, MA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Nurettin Senol)

Jyoti Sah

- Won the 2026 SJSU Student RSCA Competition
- Participant in the 2026 CSU Research Competition

Kiyone Tanaka-Gacayan

- Accepted paper to present titled “Designing for Transformation: A Pilot Content Analysis Study of the Characteristics of Transformative Media” to be presented at the 2026 Association for Information Science & Technology conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico (June 2026) (Faculty mentor: Carli Lowe) **recipient of UROP travel award*

STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Miyuki Tokuhara

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)
- Pennsylvania State University Summer Research Opportunity Program fellow (summer 2026 cohort)

Nisitha Kakulapati

- Won Life Sciences Award (top undergraduate research in life sciences category) for her poster titled “The Role of COUP at ETS Modulating PCV Identity” at the 2026 Stanford Undergraduate Research Conference in Palo Alto, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Theresa Dinh)

Rina Devarajan

- Accepted paper to present titled “Designing for Transformation: A Pilot Content Analysis Study of the Characteristics of Transformative Media” to be presented at the 2026 Association for Information Science & Technology conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico (June 2026) (Faculty mentor: Carli Lowe) *recipient of UROP travel award

Sameer Ali

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)
- SJSU Student RSCA fellow (2026-27 cohort)

Samipya Bhusal

- Presented paper titled “Bridging Safety and Context: Interpretable Hazard Detection in Manufacturing Environments” at the Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers in Arlington, Texas (Faculty mentor: Dr. Yue Luo)

Seline Venzon

- Presented paper titled “Bridging Safety and Context: Interpretable Hazard Detection in Manufacturing Environments” at the 2026 Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers Conference and Expo in Arlington, Texas (Faculty mentor: Dr. Yue Luo)

Tanequa Bailey

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)

Tina Le

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)

STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

PROGRAM ALUMNI

Alida Thao (21-22 Cohort)

- Co-authored manuscript “The relationship between social support and social negativity on social media for virtual socializing and college students’ anxiety levels during the COVID-19 pandemic” in the research journal *Computers in Human Behavior* (Faculty mentor: Dr. Ni Zhang)

Danino Corsis (24-25 cohort)

- Co-presented poster titled “Probing Autophagy Activity in Ras and Myc Tumors” at the 2026 West Coast Biological Sciences Undergraduate Research Conference in Rohnert Park, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Bree Grillo-Hill)

Emily Santana Anzures (24-25 cohort)

- Won top paper award for her co-authored presentation titled “Resistance as a pathway to reframing: Broadening the theoretical foundations of Relationship-Centered Care” in the Health Communication Interest Group at Western States Communication Association in San Diego, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Marie Haverfield)

Jeffrey Khaing (24-25 cohort)

- Won top paper award for his co-authored presentation titled “Resistance as a pathway to reframing: Broadening the theoretical foundations of Relationship-Centered Care” in the Health Communication Interest Group at Western States Communication Association in San Diego, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Marie Haverfield)

Krishiv Haranath (24-25 cohort)

- Co-authored book chapter titled “AI-Driven Underwater Vehicles and Drones” in the edited collection “AI Below the Surface: Navigating the Deep Ocean with Intelligence” (Elsevier) (Faculty mentor: Dr. Vishnu Pendyala)

Luisa Torres (24-25 cohort)

- McNair Scholar (2026-27 cohort)

STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mariam Malik (24-25 cohort)

- Won Best Oral Presentation Award (physiology or developmental biology category) at the 2026 West Coast Biological Sciences Undergraduate Research Conference in Rohnert Park, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Katherine Wilkinson)
- Accepted poster titled “Voltage-gated sodium channel Nav1.1 is necessary for muscle spindle afferent function in adult mice” at the American Physiological Society Summit in Minneapolis, MN
- Won National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program Honorable Mention

Rhea Shaik (24-25 Cohort)

- Won Life Sciences Award (top undergraduate research in life sciences category) for her poster titled “The Role of COUP at ETS Modulating PCV Identity” at the 2026 Stanford Undergraduate Research Conference in Palo Alto, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Theresa Dinh)

Sara Nayeem (23-24 cohort)

- Co-authored manuscript titled “Enhancing Delivery of High-Quality Communication at Discharge: A Pilot Study of Presence Circles With Nursing Students” in the research journal Nursing and Health Sciences (Faculty mentor: Dr. Marie Haverfield)

Thaneesha Singh (24-25 cohort)

- Won Life Sciences Award (top undergraduate research in life sciences category) for her poster titled “The Role of COUP at ETS Modulating PCV Identity” at the 2026 Stanford Undergraduate Research Conference in Palo Alto, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Theresa Dinh)

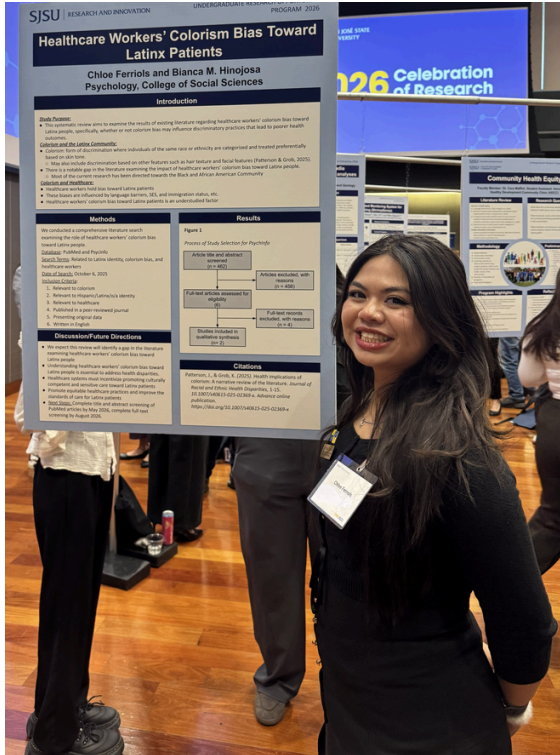
Yadanar Khin (23-24 cohort)

- Co-presented poster titled “Probing Autophagy Activity in Ras and Myc Tumors” at the 2026 West Coast Biological Sciences Undergraduate Research Conference in Rohnert Park, CA (Faculty mentor: Dr. Bree Grillo-Hill)

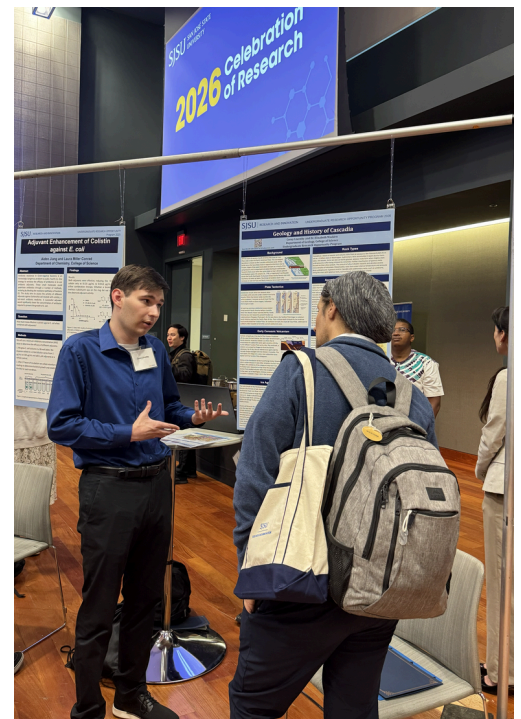
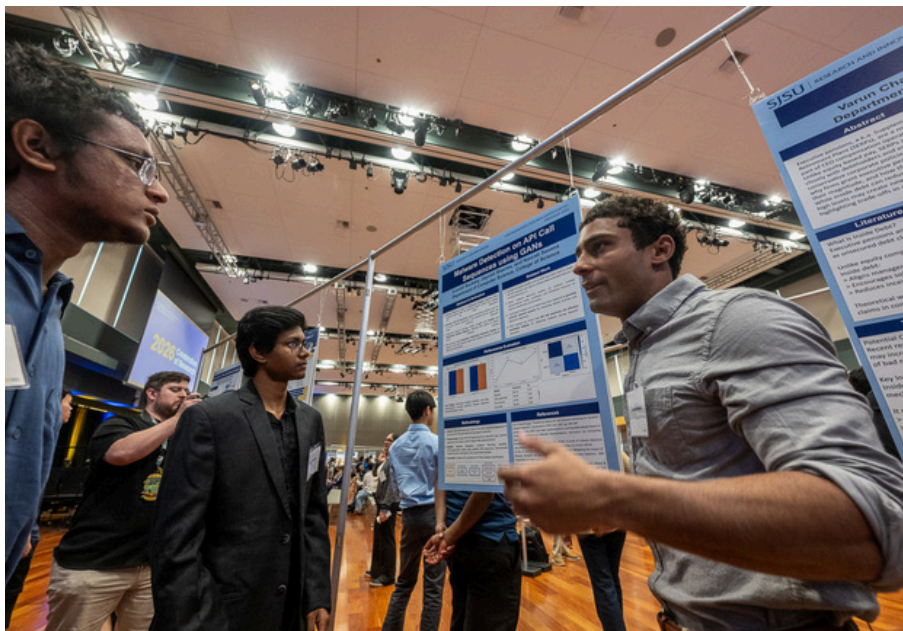
CELEBRATION OF RESEARCH

APRIL 16, 2026

SJSU's fifth annual Celebration of Research during Research Week showcased the impactful and wide-ranging work of this year's UROP students and faculty mentors. Over the past year, students collaborated closely with their mentors to develop projects driven by curiosity, innovation, and dedication.



In total, 93 students participated in the event, including 46 interdisciplinary projects that brought together students and faculty from different colleges across campus. Congratulations to the 2025–26 UROP cohort on an outstanding year of research and achievement! We look forward to seeing these students continue to grow and thrive at SJSU and beyond.



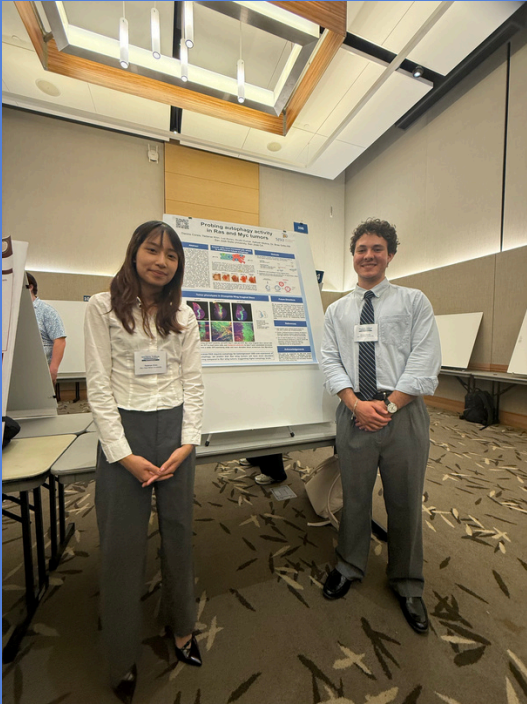
UROP x LCOE RESEARCH SHOWCASE

APRIL 13, 2026

Since UROP's inaugural year in 2021–22, the Lurie College of Education has been a valued partner in supporting UROP's growth and transformation, including hosting the program's core courses and providing instructional support. To celebrate this partnership, the research forum highlighted the interdisciplinary work of faculty members Dina Izenstark, Cara Maffini, and Janet Bang alongside their UROP student mentees Rishona Martin, Keira Huynh, and Hannah Tofesha. Their projects showcased the wide range of undergraduate research happening across campus and the collaborative mentorship that makes it possible. We are grateful for our continued partnership with LCoE and look forward to many more years of collaboration.



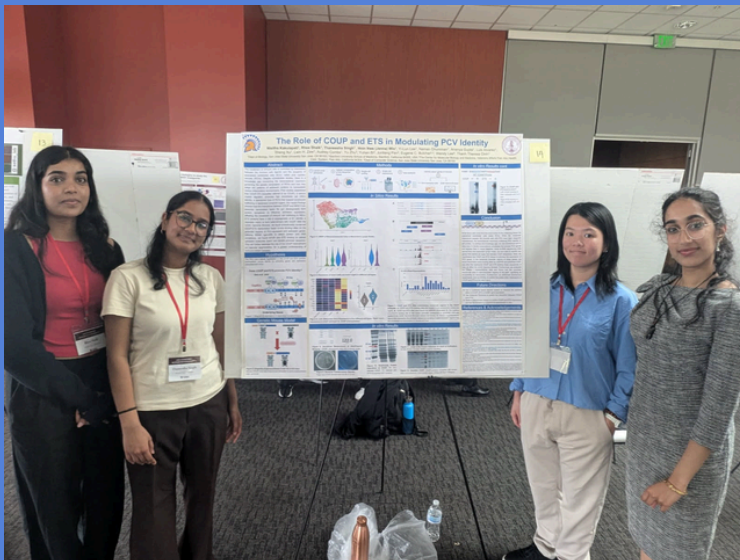
UROP STUDENTS IN ACTION



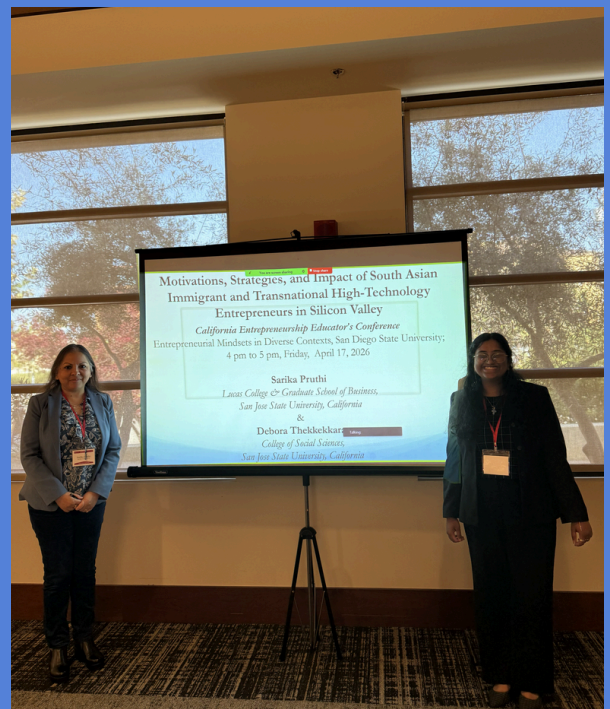
Yadanar Khin (23–24 cohort) and Danino Corsis (24–25 cohort) co-present their poster at the West Coast Biological Sciences Undergraduate Research Conference at Sonoma State University on April 11, 2026.



Jayden Thai (current cohort) presents his research at International Symposium on Digital Forensics and Security in Boston, MA on March 19, 2026.



Rhea Shaik (24–25 cohort), Thaneesha Singh (24–25 cohort), and Nisitha Kakulapati (current cohort) co-present their poster at the Stanford Undergraduate Research Conference in Palo Alto, CA on April 11, 2026



Debora Thekkekkara (current cohort) and her faculty mentor Dr. Sarika Pruthi co-present their poster at the California Entrepreneurship Educators Conference in San Diego, CA on April 18, 2026

OTHER PROGRAM UPDATES

2026-27 Student and Faculty Applications

Are you interested in participating in UROP as a student or faculty mentor? Applications for next year's cohort are now live. You can apply directly by clicking on the links below:

- Student application:
- Faculty application:

UROP Information Sessions

During the spring and summer, UROP will be hosting a number of information sessions for prospective students where we will provide a detailed overview of the program, discuss FAQs, and important deadline information. Follow our website and Instagram page for updated dates in the coming weeks.

UROP @ the Summer Orientation Resource Fairs

UROP will be attendance for all of the summer resource fair orientations. Transfer orientations will take place on select dates in June from 2:30-4:30p, and the frosh orientations will take place on select dates in July from 3-430p.

- **Transfer orientations:**

<https://www.sjsu.edu/newspartans/transfer-orientation/>

- **Frosh orientations:**

<https://www.sjsu.edu/newspartans/frosh-orientation/>

Reach out/connect with us

Follow UROP on IG *@urop_sjsu*

Follow us on LinkedIn *@UROP at San Jose State*

Email us at *urop@sjsu.edu*

Learn more about our program at [sjsu.edu/urop](https://www.sjsu.edu/urop)

UROP introduction video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8PPmEVzOBI>

UROB BY THE NUMBERS

2025-26 COHORT

46

STUDENT
INTERDISCIPLINARY
PARTNERSHIPS

9

ACADEMIC CONFERENCE
PRESENTATIONS

4

FELLOWSHIPS
OBTAINED

7

SJSU RSCA
COMPETITION
PARTICIPANTS

10

MCGAIR
SCHOLARS

1

LSU RESEARCH
COMPETITION
PARTICIPANTS

THANK YOU TO OUR UROP ADMIN TEAM!



As we celebrate the end of another successful cohort and the program's fifth year anniversary on campus, we want to take a moment to thank our dedicated program admin team: Veldana Kostic, Luisa Torres, and Danino Corsis. Their support in mentoring our students, leading outreach and recruitment efforts, and serving as thought partners with passion and attention to detail have been essential to taking UROP to the next level. We are excited to bring Luisa and Danino back to continue their roles as peer mentors next year, and we wish Veldana continued success as she graduates this May with her Master of Public Health degree.